



**Minutes of Community Action Group meeting
22nd June 2009
2.30 pm RCCE, Offices, Feering**

Attendees:

Canon John Brown (JB)	Rural Community Council of Essex – CAG Chair
Paul Williams (PW)	Essex County Council
Philip Wilson (PhW)	Essex County Council
Joy Sheppard (JS)	Essex Association of Local Councils
Suzanne Harris (SH)	Rural Community Council of Essex
Ken Edwards (KE)	Chelmsford Sport
Chris Rust (CR)	Maldon District Council
Keith Brown (KB)	Federation of Small Businesses
Kitty Barrett (KBa)	Braintree District Council
Ann Booth (AB)	Citizens Advice Bureau
Alison Jennings (AJ)	IN-Tend
Keith Cheesman (KC)	Essex County Council
Darren Smart (DC)	Essex Libraries
Iain Wicks (IW)	Federation of Small Businesses
Sheila Jackman (SJ)	Ongar Town Council

Attendance

Kirsty Monk (KM)	RCCE (minutes)
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Apologies

Angela Balcombe (AB)	ECC
Judy Cuddeford (JC)	BDVSA
Mike Hall (MH)	AUEE
Melanie Rundle (MR)	Colchester Borough Council
Sue Sumner (SS)	CVS Uttlesford UVCC
Paul Murphy (PM)	Director Maldon DC Vol. Service
Chris Allen (CA)	EEDA
Wendy Jackson (WJ)	ECC
Rachel Price (RP)	ECC
Linda Riley (LR)	VST
Jenny Salisbury (JeS)	Essex Libraries
David Eniffer (DE)	Volunteer Centre Tendring

Chairman's Introduction

John Brown (JB) (Chairman) welcomed and thanked all for attending the meeting, introductions were made.

Apologies: (please see above)

2 Minutes of the previous meeting (23rd March 2009) & matters arising.

Matters of Accuracy:

No Matters of Accuracy were raised.

Those present then agreed the minutes.

**The following were reported as updates/ matters arising from those minutes
Matters Arising**

KM advised that Pauline Mann would now attend future meetings of the Community Action Group on behalf of Tendring Community Transport as Theresa Coyne had now retired.

Migrant Workers/ Essex Multi Agency Forum - MAF.

PW advised that he had attended 2 further meetings of the Essex MAF, and the group was progressing well with the terms of reference now agreed. He had found it difficult to source solid statistical data regarding migrant workers. He had managed to obtain statistical data for Southend but nothing for the ECC area.

KE: felt that we needed to get a real feel for the numbers involved to understand what actions might be required.

AJ: explained that it has been traditionally hard to accurately reflect true numbers of Migrant workers as their work was seasonal and transient by nature – some also do not want to be “visible”.

DS advised that library services have data available which shows the ethnic breakdown of library users, this could be used to give an indication of the population make up.

AB advised that CAB held statistical data which may be of interest regarding CAB migrant worker footfall.

PW advised that there would shortly be an online website for Migrant workers to direct them towards services.

Action: PW to forward KM Migrant worker website details for circulation.

PW/KM

Action: PW offered to continue his research regarding statistical data available on migrant workers in Essex.

PW
AB/KM/
PW
AB

Action: AB to find out whether it would be possible to send details of CAB Migrant Worker Footfall Statistics

Further matters arising were covered within the main agenda items

- 3 **The “Credit Crunch” a view from the CAB service in the East of England – Presentation by Ann Booth, Citizens Advice Bureau**
(An electronic copy of this presentation has been circulated with these minutes for your information).

AB explained that the Citizens Advice Bureau were comprised of 420 independent charities with membership of the national association.

Most staff are volunteers and approximately 5,000 of the 25,000 staff are specialist paid advisors. All advisors underwent rigorous 6 month accredited training as they had to deal with complex areas of work. A new shorter intensive CAB advisor training scheme is being developed at present.

CAB had seen a significant 9% rise in the number of new problems reported and a 1.5 million increase in customers using their CAB “advice-guide” website. CAB main areas of work are information and advice, casework, preventative work and work on social policy.

In addition to the high street CABs, there were also various outreach services provided in a number of community locations such as: kiosks (Advice guide online information points), schools, libraries, council offices, etc, in order to reach as many people as possible. Debt, benefits, tax credits, employment and housing queries were the main areas of concern for customers.

AB reported that there was notable increase in rural redundancies and although urban areas had also seen an increase it was not as high. Rural financial exclusion was often a hidden problem, difficult to map and some of the key contributing issues to this problem in rural areas were:

- more pensioners in poverty
- more low paid workers
- seasonal work
- geographical isolation
- cost of goods and services higher
- benefit take-up rates lower
- higher travel and transport costs
- migrant workers – tensions and discrimination
- more limited access to advice/support

Demand for help and advice was outstripping supply at present, with demand in the East of England area higher than the national average. CAB were keen to develop the preventative side of their work, as the earlier in the process they could get involved in general the less serious the customers problems are to tackle.

EEDA has allocated 10 million in European Social Funding to the CAB in order extend opening hours and target financial exclusion hotspots over the next 2 years. They were also trialing the CAB "Gateway Service" which triages problems and refers users to the appropriate service for advice and help. This system has increased the number of customers that can be helped each day in the current pilot scheme. Funding for a call centre is needed with a central helpline. Currently 8 offices in Essex offer a virtual call centre and it is hoped that more offices will join the scheme.

Questions:

Q. SJ reported that the outreach service provided in Ongar was due to end due to lack of funding.

Action:

A. AB to respond to SJ regarding the Ongar CAB outreach service once she has spoken with the Epping Officer.

Q CR asked for more information about CAB kiosks and where could be located.

A. AB responded that they needed to be accessible but in a "private" area, within a building accessible by the local community. Users may not wish others to know they are using the CAB kiosks service; we have to be sensitive to this when finding a suitable location. The kiosks link in to the CAB website and cost around £6,000 to install with some ongoing maintenance costs to the hosts.

AB

PhW understood that the new ECC Community information points where the same kiosk online system as the CAB kiosks.

Actions:

PhW to liaise with AB to find out whether these sites could link in with each other.

PhW/AB

DS to liaise with AB to see whether it is possible to work with CAB to sign post the CAB website in rural libraries via the internet access available on site and target this service at more rural libraries throughout Essex (73 sites in Essex currently have internet access).

DS/AB

AB to report back to the Group regarding CAB kiosks in supermarkets- there is an issue identified regarding their suitability as potential sites due to the lack of confidentiality for the user.

AB

4 **Rural small businesses – what DOES the future hold? – presentation by Keith Brown, Essex Regional Organiser Federation of Small Businesses**
(An electronic copy of this presentation has been circulated with these minutes for your information).

KB explained that the Federation of Small Businesses a membership organisation. Its aim is to promote and to protect the interests of the self-employed and owners of small businesses, with 3 key areas of work lobbying and campaigning, events and member benefits.

99.3% of businesses employing fewer than 49 people, and significant number in Essex are based in rural areas, either in a village (16%) or on a farm (15%). In a survey of members based in rural communities nearly one in three said the next six months will be difficult for their business. More than 80 per cent of small businesses are already suffering with rising costs coupled with 46 per cent which are seeing trade decreasing.

FSB felt that Essex business needed:

- better access to broadband and e-commerce
- access to training at convenient times for businesses
- better standards of numeracy and literacy amongst potential staff.
- Incubation and start up units with easy in, easy out terms – converted farm buildings are often ideal and greater understanding and support for businesses from planning

departments.

- to promote keeping trade local
- good support from Councils, Business Link and Enterprise Agencies
- access to funding – Banking on Essex a good initiative
- sympathetic attitude from local authorities

5 **Essex Rural Partnership Strategy Review Working Group Update**

SH reported that the ERP Strategy Working Group had met twice and produced the first draft of the strategy and were now at the next stage of the writing process. Each member of the group had been given one of the 6 key themes to draft and SH was to top and tale the strategy.

SH advised that the action plan element of the draft strategy may be circulated to the appropriate action groups for comment shortly and that the Steering Group would be meeting to July to review the draft strategy. The draft will then go before members at the Full Partnership for approval at their next meeting on 9th September and then out for wider consultation once approved for circulation. We hope to launch the New ERP Rural Strategy by mid to late November.

6 **Village Agents Update**

KC reported that the Village Agents Launch event held on 17th June in Braintree had had very good attendance with over 120 people attending from the key areas of delivery (Mid Essex) as well as partner and stakeholder organisations. The pilot period will run until March 2011 with the expectation that with its success it will be able to secure funding for its continuation in the future. The pilot will run in Mid Essex (Braintree 6 village agents, Chelmsford and Maldon- 3 village agents in each district) with the aim of expanding the project throughout Essex if the pilot has proved beneficial. The Village Agent Manager is shortly due to be recruited and then the Village Agents themselves (who will most likely come from the area they support) will be recruited thereafter. The Village Agents Pilot will be hosted by RCCE and funded by Braintree District Council, NHS Mid Essex and Essex County Council.

KC invited input and partnership working on this project from ERP membership organisations.

7 **Any Other Business**

Joint Action Group Work.

Action: to follow up on Fear of Crime and Tourism Joint Working Group meetings.

JB/SH/
PHW

Ashlyns Organics Ltd - Can Cook Will Cook

SH reported that a new project called Can Cook Will Cook is being piloted. **Ashlyns Organics Ltd** with the help of RCCE will use its **£419,576** Big Lottery award for its **Can Cook Will Cook** project to work with families who have poor basic skills or other social disadvantages. Workshops will develop skills in numeracy and literacy while sharing knowledge about cookery and nutrition. Ashlyns and RCCE are currently recruiting for a Senior Trainer and Project Coordinator which they hope to have in place fairly shortly.

Action: SH to circulate job details to group

SH

Forthcoming Events.

Essex Rural Partnership Full Membership Meeting

Date : Wednesday 9th September 2009, Venue : The Salings Millennium Hall, Piccotts Lane, Great Saling, CM7 5DW. Time: Registration and Refreshments 9.30am to 10.00.am, Meeting commences: 10.00am to 1. 15pm. Buffet Lunch 1.15pm to 2.00 pm

Business Against Crime – Free event hosted by Federation of Small Business on 6th October “Business Against Crime”

KB/ KM

Action: KB to forward event details to KM for circulation

8 **Date of next CAG group meeting**

TBA

Action: KM to circulate possible meeting dates (wk commencing 17th August)

KM